

ST. LUKE'S CHURCH  
SMITHFIELD, VA.

ISLE OF WIGHT LIBRARY  
SMITHFIELD BRANCH



University, is an annual program of Robert and Marilyn Deluca tours that educate civic and business

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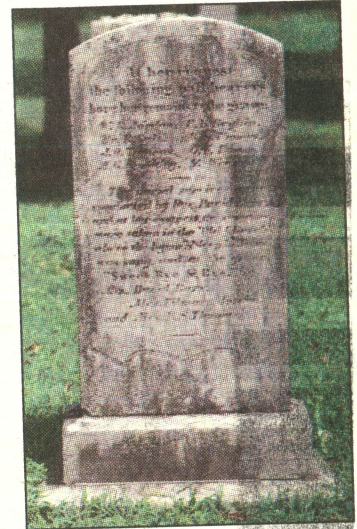
ISLE OF WIGHT ■ SMITHFIELD ■ SUFFOLK ■ SURRY

# h of the James

Neighbors

Daily Press

## Tales from the crypt



The tombstone of Fannie N. Parker, who was born Oct. 15, 1835, and died May 20, 1886, gives a detailed account of her funeral, much like an obituary in a newspaper.

**Left:** This is the St. Luke's Church cemetery as seen from the church porch.

Photos by **Adrin Snider**/  
Daily Press

he says.

All of the property at St. Luke's, including the graves, are cared for by a full time





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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17, 1994

ISLE OF WIGHT ■ SMITH

# South<sup>over</sup> of the James Neighbors



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*There were all sorts of tales about supposedly flowing images in the churchyard.*  
 Curator Richard Austin  
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## Tales from the crypt

St. Luke's offers visitors glimpse of past lives

By Judi Tull  
 Daily Press

### ISLE OF WIGHT

Dead men may tell no tales, but their gravestones can sure say a lot.

Nowhere in Southside are the weathered tombstones more eloquent than in the cemeteries at Historic St. Luke's Church.

Four distinct cemeteries actually comprise the graves now cared for by Historic St. Luke's



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Davis and  
Jordan family prop-  
erties that became part of the  
church after Route 10 was moved.  
"Suffice it to say that it was a very  
complicated arrangement to get it all

togeth-  
er," Austin  
says. He estimates  
that there are more than 1,500  
graves on the property, although a defi-  
nite number cannot be ascertained  
because many graves remain unmarked,

maintenance staff or  
two people.

The oldest readable  
stone in the cemetery  
belongs to James Easson,  
the Scottish merchant who  
settled in Smithfield in the  
early 1700s. The engraving on  
Easson's stone slab, chipped and  
battered and worn away with time,  
is barely legible except for the year of  
his passing: 1767.

"We believe that there are older graves  
here, but we just can't be sure when they  
are from," says Austin.

The crypts of Joseph Bridger and  
Anne Randall lie inside the church, in  
front of the altar and beneath the

Please see **Graves/S2**

# New video details St. Luke's history

by Judi Tull  
Daily Press

## ISLE OF WIGHT

Lights! Camera! History!

It's surely the smallest the-  
ater in the area: just nine fold-  
ing chairs tucked into a tiny  
space that once housed  
restrooms.

But for Historic St. Luke's  
Church, the room and the brand  
new video tape that is shown  
here are a leap into the future  
and a boon to the nearly 20,000  
visitors who come to the nation-  
al shrine each year.

The 11-minute video, which  
was produced by Features Inter-  
national of Chesapeake, was  
scripted by St. Luke's curator  
Richard Austin and was filmed  
at the site over a period of sev-  
eral days last spring.

Many of the shots are stills  
from history books or close-ups  
of artifacts that visitors never  
see when they tour the oldest  
church in America.

Among those relics are Bibles  
from 1629, silver wine flagons  
from 1683, and a silver gilt chal-

ice from the early 1600s. These  
items are kept in the church's  
safe and are only displayed dur-  
ing the annual homecoming in  
May.

The production of the video,  
which cost around \$15,000, and  
the renovation of the viewing  
room were paid for by Historic  
St. Luke's Restoration, Inc., the  
foundation which maintains the  
church and grounds.

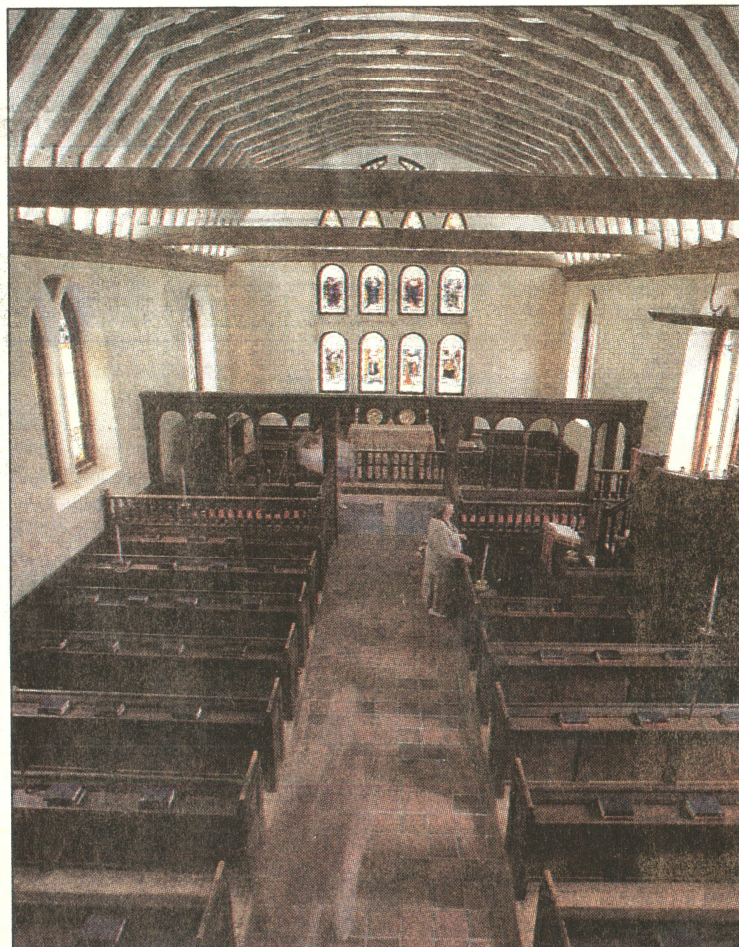
The 31-inch television and  
videotape player were paid for  
by a \$3,125 grant from the estate  
of Jessie Ball DuPont, a bene-  
factor of the church during the  
1960s.

Signs will let visitors know  
that the tape is available and  
they may see it on request.

Austin says that some visitors  
who have seen the tape during  
these first two weeks have asked  
if it is possible to buy copies of  
it and he is now considering  
making the tape available to the  
public.

"It wasn't my original inten-

Please see **Video/S2**



The crypts of Joseph Bridger and Anne Randall lie inside St. Luke's,  
in front of the altar and beneath stained-glass windows.



Restoration, Inc., the foundation which oversees the church and its 20-acre property.

The Old Church Cemetery, at the rear of the church, is home to the oldest graves, many of which are assumed to date back to the 1600s, says curator Richard Austin.

On the southern side of the church's property, the once-private Benn's Church cemetery was merged with St. Luke's in the early 1900s.

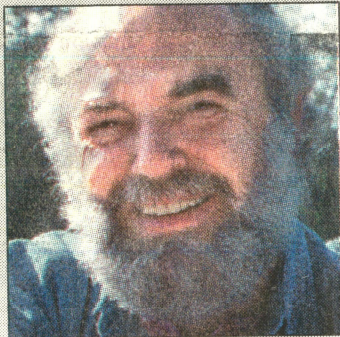
To the north, St. Luke's Memorial Park, the most modern cemetery, was started in the late 1930s and purchased by the foundation in 1977. Burials are still allowed in the Memorial Park. The fourth cluster of graves originally came

from the Davis and Jordan family properties that became part of the church after Route 10 was moved.

"Suffice it to say that it was a very complicated arrangement to get it all

together," Austin says. He estimates that there are more than 1,500 graves on the property, although a definite number cannot be ascertained because many graves remain unmarked,

### FAMILIAR FACE?



The face is familiar. So is the voice. But what's he doing there in the cemetery at Historic St. Luke's church instead of surrounded by vegetables or asking for help for hungry children?

Alan Sader, whose face is known in this area as a spokesman for Farm Fresh grocery stores, is the on-camera presence for the new video for Historic St. Luke's Church.

Sader's acting experience includes movies with Mary Tyler Moore, June Lockhart and Sissy Spacek as well as a stint on "Another Life," a soap opera produced in Virginia.

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But for Historic St. Luke's Church, the room and the brand new video tape that is shown there are a leap into the future and a boon to the nearly 20,000 visitors who come to the national shrine each year.

The 11-minute video, which was produced by Features International of Chesapeake, was scripted by St. Luke's curator Richard Austin and was filmed at the site over a period of several days last spring.

Many of the shots are stills from history books or close-ups of artifacts that visitors never see when they tour the oldest church in America.

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ice from the early 1600s. These items are kept in the church's safe and are only displayed during the annual homecoming in May.

The production of the video, which cost around \$15,000, and the renovation of the viewing room were paid for by Historic St. Luke's Restoration, Inc., the foundation which maintains the church and grounds.

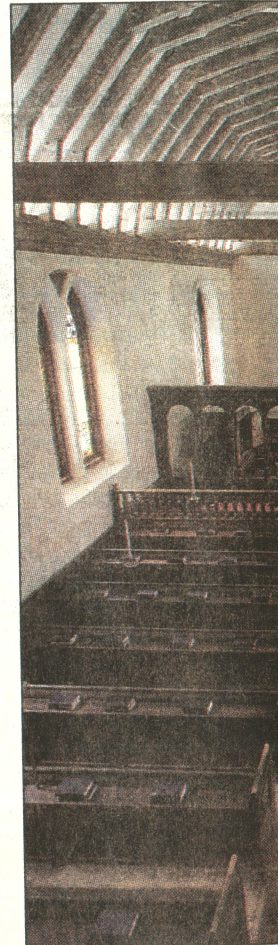
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Please see Video/S2



The crypts of Joseph Briney in front of the altar and t



# Churchyard Has Unique History

SMITHFIELD — Forward of the rood screen of the Old Brick Church south of Smithfield, which is believed to have been built in 1632, are two graves covered by fine flat-surfaced tombstones of the style of the wealthier Virginians of Colonial times.

The tomb on the right is that of Anne Randall, who died July 23, 1696, supposedly the sister-in-law of Capt. Joseph Bridger who is said to have been the builder of the church and the father of Col. Bridger. Actually the Colonel's father was Samuel Bridger who never visited Virginia at all.

There is much confusion about the period and the part people played in the history of the delightful church, considered the oldest standing church of English origin on the continent. The other marble tombstone on the left is that of Colonel Bridger, who also has been identified as the builder

of the church. The Colonel, however, was born in 1628 and was a mere child when the church construction was started. Still there is positive evidence that Colonel Bridger did more than anyone else to help finish the fine Episcopal Church since, obviously such edifices were not thrown up in a hurry in those days.

Colonel Bridger of Old England, was an enterprising man who had settled at "White Marsh" in Isle of Wight County where he developed a large and profitable business trading Virginia tobacco for commodities needed and desired by the colonists. The country had progressed to the point where some of the finer embellishments of life were considered quite necessary. Churches, too, had to progress beyond the log bench and thatched roof stage. What is seen at the Old Brick Church (or St. Luke's) today is exactly what was

seen in the Colonel's day with the exception of the concealed lights overhead and the stained glass windows. The single candles of the pews have had the wicks removed and wires inserted to light bulbs which look like candle flames, so it all looks authentic just short of the flicker.

Colonel Bridger must have been in Virginia quite a few years since he was a member of the House of Burgesses in 1657. By the time of his death in 1683 he was one of the wealthiest men in the colony. His wife, Hester Pitt, was related to the Driver family of Gloucestershire, England. Two members of the Driver family, Charles and Thomas, were brought to Virginia by the Colonel and reportedly were the "master builders" who finished St. Luke's in its present form. In the southwest corner of the square tower

their initials can be found.

County records, however, indicate the Drivers did not reach manhood until the last quarter of the 17th century. Like the Bridger there is no proof they were in the county before 1657.

The Colonel's plantation in Isle of Wight County encompassed 850 acres. He lived there with his wife and seven children, but at the time of his death he disinherited his elder son, Joseph Jr. for what he called, going "diverse ways." The boy, however, eventually acquired his inheritance.

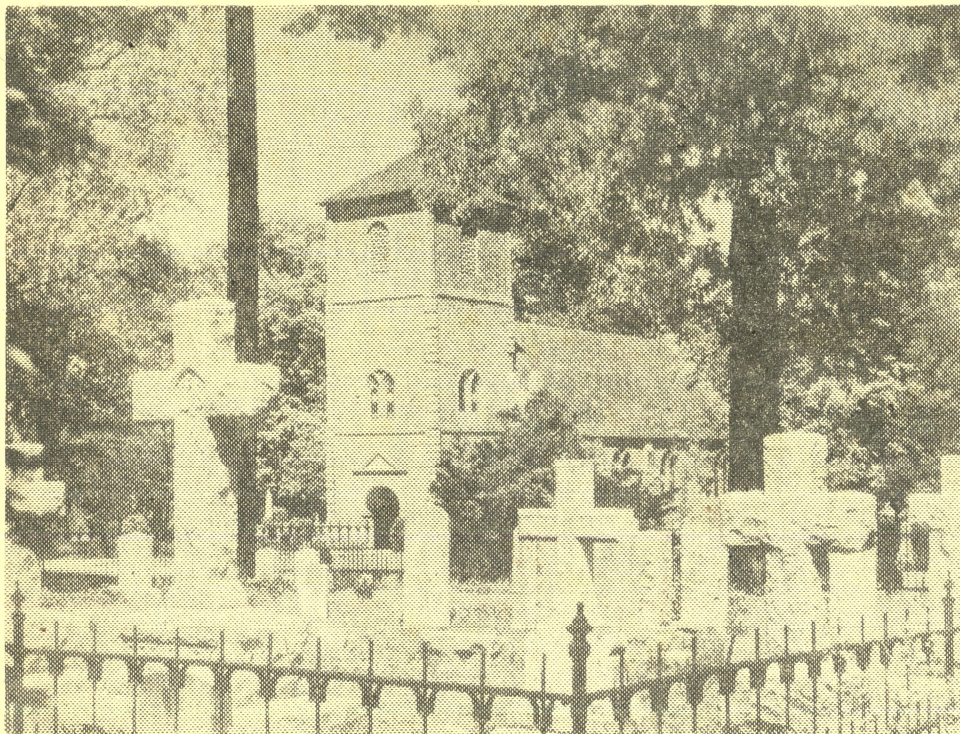
An inventory of the Colonel's furnishings, in 1686, showed that he was a "gentleman of the times." He had two houses and his practices as recorded provide a wealth of information for students today. In all, the Colonel owned 12,000 acres of exceptionally good land on which he produced tobacco and cattle, shipping the latter to England, undoubtedly.

Colonel Bridger was a member of the Commission to adjust the boundary between Maryland and Virginia in 1664. He was a member of the Governor's Council in 1675 and sat as a member of the "Greenspring Court" which condemned to death the leaders of Nathaniel Bacon's Rebellion.

Bridger, in 1680, was commander-in-chief of the militia of Isle of Wight, Surry, Lower Norfolk and Upper Norfolk (Nansemond) counties, with the rank of Major General. He also was a witness of Sir William Berkeley's will May 2, 1676, before the tyrant Governor returned to England where he died in disgrace.

The three sons and four daughters of "the Honorable Joseph Bridger, Esquire, member of the council of the State of Virginia," had many descendants some of whom attended the 1957 re-dedication of the Old Brick Church which their ancestor helped to enhance in beauty and nobility. They looked upon his tombstone which had been moved from "White Marsh" late in the 19th Century and placed just before the restored altar. The carved lettering is in a beautiful English style presenting irregular, almost doggeral, but an interesting example of Virginia poetry of his period.

Bridger probably knew that in Essex, England, there stood, and still stands, a church built in 1583 which is almost identical to the Old Brick Church and which shows a Dutch and Flemish influence. One can imagine the pride he had in fostering the completion of the little Isle of Wight church and the inspiration it brought to the Colonial settlers.



**ST. LUKE'S HISTORIC GRAVEYARD**

Many of the descendants of the original parishioners of St. Luke's, or the "Old Brick Church," are buried in the churchyard. Old English lettering and spelling can be seen on quite a few tombstones. Directly in front of the entrance arch is the tomb of Henry Mason Day, president of the restoration society which preserved the nation's oldest standing church of English Gothic origin. Inside in the sanctuary are the graves of Anne Randall and Col. Joseph Bridger, 1628-1683, who was responsible for the church's early completion and whose activities are part of history.